

Fakes and a Fraud

Note to teachers: This supplement includes a discussion guide, lessons and Michigan Content Standards to use with the Michigan Time Traveler Kids' History page published in the *Lansing State Journal* on April 14, 2004. You may reproduce the pages in this supplement to use with students.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

(SOC.1.2. *Comprehend the Past*; SOC 1.3. *Analyze and Interpret the Past*; ELA.1. *Meaning and Communication in Context*)

Words to Know

Controversy: A public disagreement

Embezzlement: Taking public money for personal use

Evidence: Proof of something

Fake: A thing that is not what it appears to be; an imitation passed off as real

Forgery: Something made to imitate something else to cheat a person; counterfeiting

Fraud: a faked object passed off as genuine; the crime of passing off something counterfeit as real

Hoax: A trick or outrageous lie made up purposely to fool people

Relic: An object left behind after the disappearance of a structure, a race or a nation, especially something that had a connection to a past practice, custom or belief

The Michigan Relics. What kinds of writing and images are on the “Michigan Relics?” (Middle Eastern [Phoenician, Egyptian and ancient Greek characters]) Locate Middle Eastern countries on a classroom map. (www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/reference_maps/middle_east.html) Who “discovered” and made the objects? (James Scotford) Who promoted the fakes? (Daniel Soper) How did they fool people into believing? (They invited them to the digs to witness the objects being unearthed.)

Why Did They Make Michigan Relics? Why do people make fakes? (money) How did Scotford plan to make money from the “relics?” (selling photos) Did he try to sell objects? (Yes, he offered to sell one to Wyman.) Why were people interested in these fakes? (They thought they explained that earlier people were not the Indians, but peoples from the Middle East.)

How Do We Know They Were Fakes? What archaeological evidence shows us that the Michigan Relics are fakes? How do the way the objects were made and their materials show that they are not authentic? What statements were made by people who knew the real story? (See the “Time Traveler” page for responses.)

Fakes: Fun or Fraud? How can fakes be fun? (jokes, harmless pranks) Educational? (reproductions for education or to substitute for old or expensive items) Why didn't the men who started the Davenport Conspiracy admit what they had done? (probably too afraid or embarrassed)

ACTIVITY ONE: Map the “Discoveries”

(SOC.II.3. *Location, Movement, and Connections*; SOC II.4. *Regions, Patterns, and Processes*)

Have students color the counties in which Michigan Relics were “discovered” on an outline map of Michigan with county lines. (Map source: www.michigan.gov/hal/0,1607,7-160-15481_20826_20841---,00.html) Known locations are listed below. Use a different color for each group. Ask students to identify the region in which the counties with most discoveries are clustered (southeast lower Michigan) Ask: “If you were investigating this story, what question(s) would you ask next?” (Why were few discovered in other sections of the state?) Ask, “If I told you that objects like these were not found in other places in the United States, what would be your next question?” (If the people came to Michigan from the Middle East, why weren't more found along their routes between here and there?) Ask, “How does the map information help decide whether the objects are authentic or not? (provides one type of evidence against the relics' authenticity)

Relics reported, but poorly documented Chippewa, Iron, Mackinac, Marquette	Few “discoveries” Hillsdale, Ingham, Kent, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Otsego, Roscommon, St. Clair, Shiawassee	Many “discoveries,” well-documented Crawford, Gratiot, Isabella, Mecosta, Montcalm, Wayne (most)
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ACTIVITY TWO: Stretch Your Vocabulary

(ELA.1. Meaning and Communication: Reading; ELA.2. Meaning and Communication: Writing)

The “Time Traveler” page asked students to find the meanings of the words in the left box below and tell which words imply fraud. If this activity has not yet been done, do it now, adding the words in the right box. Have students report orally. Distribute the “Fakes and Frauds in the News” handout (page 3) to students. Read and discuss the stories. Encourage them to share other hoaxes they know. Assign: write a poem about a hoax. Use one of these words in the title and as many as you can in the poem. Share the poems in a read-aloud session or by posting on a bulletin board.

bogus	gyp	replica	deception	fiction	piracy	bamboozle
counterfeit	hoax	reproduction	deceitful	imposter	prank	dupe
fake	humbug	sham	false	myth	spurious	falsify
fictitious	look-alike	simulated	fantasy	phony	urban legend	hoodwink
flummery	phony	spoof				hornswoggle
forgery						

ACTIVITY THREE: Effects of Hoaxes

(SOC.I.2. Comprehend the Past; SOC.III.2. Ideals of American Democracy; SOC.VII.1. Responsible Personal Conduct)

Hoaxes have been with us for centuries. Ask students to tell Aesop’s fable about the boy who cried “Wolf.” (Shepherd, told to call out “Wolf” if he needed help from villagers while guarding sheep, calls it needlessly and laughs at people who come to help. When the wolf arrives, the villagers no longer believe him and do not come.) Ask: “What made this story a hoax?” (The boy lied to fool the villagers.) “What did the shepherd lose when he lied to the villagers?” (their trust) Tell students that hoaxes have various effects, many based in lack of trust. Referring to the stories on the “Fakes and Frauds in the News” handout, share these effects with students:

Core Democratic Values

- **The Pursuit of Happiness.** People may pursue happiness in their own way, so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others. Hoaxes and frauds always cheat others out of something, whether it is trust or money.
- **Common Good.** Citizens have an obligation to promote the welfare of the community and to work together for the benefit of all. Tricking and defrauding others benefits only the perpetrator (until caught) and harms others.

Economic

- Antiques and memorabilia dealers and manufacturers see their things lose value because buyers cannot tell what is the good or real product. The buyers lose their trust in the sellers.
- Insurance costs rise for everyone when the companies must pay claims to people who have been cheated.
- Tax dollars must be used to find, prosecute and punish those who perpetrate frauds.

Scholarly or Scientific

- Scientists waste time trying to understand and make sense of incorrect information from a hoax. Because the Piltdown Man hoax provided wrong information, it delayed a more accurate understanding of human evolution for years.
- Students learn false information when hoaxes are believed and become part of textbooks and lessons.

Distribute the “Effects of Hoaxes” handout (page 4). Ask students to complete the table. Discuss. Accept any response the student can substantiate from the “Fakes and Frauds in the News” page or through reasoning. Possible responses are included in the PDF of this Teacher’s Guide on the Web at www.sos.state.mi.us/history/timetraveler/guide_menu.html.

ACTIVITY FOUR: Write a Letter to the Editor

(SOC.III.2. Ideals of American Democracy; SOC.VII.3. Persuasive Writing; ELA.2. Meaning and Communication: Writing)

The media—especially newspapers—have publicized hoaxes throughout history. Exciting stories sell newspapers. Ask students to pretend they learned about one of the hoaxes in these lessons from a news story. Assign: write a letter to the editor to tell the newspaper (1) that you recognize the story as a hoax, (2) why you think it is a hoax, and (3) the reasons that the newspaper should not help spread the information.

RESOURCES

Digging Up Controversy: The Michigan Relics (online exhibit tour): www.sos.state.mi.us/history/michrelics/
The Museum of Hoaxes: www.museumofhoaxes.com/

Teachers, please send your suggestions for these Teacher’s Guides to timetraveler@michigan.gov. Find past newspaper pages and teacher’s guides online in PDF format at www.sos.state.mi.us/history/timetraveler/.

Fakes and Frauds in the News

The Cardiff Giant

George Hull, a Binghamton, New York, cigar-maker, had the Cardiff Giant made with the intention of creating a attraction that people would pay to see. The ten-foot-tall figure was carved from a giant slab of gypsum, artificially aged and buried in 1868. When it was "discovered" in 1869, visitors flocked to see it, paying fifty cents each for the privilege. The hoax was exposed within two months, but it made money while it lasted.

The Piltdown Man

In 1908 lawyer Charles Dawson, an amateur geologist and archaeologist, discovered fragments of a thick human skull in a gravel quarry at Piltdown in Sussex, England. Four years later additional fragments of that skull and an ape-like jaw were found at the same location. This appeared to be the long-sought evolutionary "missing link" between humans and apes. However, scientific studies years later showed that the Piltdown Man had not been buried for a very long time and that the bones had been stained to look old. The jaw was that of an orangutan whose teeth had been filed down. The mystery of who staged the hoax has never been solved. Although many were accused, no one ever confessed.

Wisconsin State Capitol Collapses

The Madison [WI] Capital-Times reported that a series of explosions—caused by gas generated by heated debate in the legislature—had destroyed the state's capitol building. The newspaper printed a photograph that showed the dome falling away as the building crumbled. The fake photo looks phony to us today, but many people were fooled by it when the story ran on April 1, 1933.

The Hitler Diaries

In 1983 a German magazine paid the equivalent of over \$6 million (U.S.) for a 62-volume set of diaries. The diaries were supposedly written by Hitler, found in a crashed airplane after World War II, hidden by an East German general and then smuggled out of the country. Magazines and newspapers around the world were excited and were willing to pay for the rights to print parts or all of them. However, when made public, experts showed that the diaries were fake. The paper was modern. A seller of World War II memorabilia had studied Hitler's handwriting and faked the pages. A reporter from the magazine had helped with the sale and kept some of the money paid by the magazine. Both men went to prison.

The Taco Liberty Bell

On April 1, 1996, the Taco Bell Corporation announced that it had purchased the Liberty Bell from the U.S. government and would rename it the "Taco Liberty Bell." Some people believed the story and called the National Historic Park in Philadelphia to protest. A few hours after the announcement, a planned follow-up announcement told that it was a joke. Taco Bell's advertising firm had planned the nationwide publicity stunt. According to reports, Taco Bell sales increased greatly on April 1 and 2.

Howell Crop Circles – Plus a 2nd Hoax

Crop circles, mysterious flattened patterns, have been found in some farmers' fields since the 1970s. Occurring at night, some people blamed the wind; others thought aliens landed in these places. In July 2003, crop circles appeared on a farm near Howell, Michigan. The circles damaged the farmer's wheat. Hundreds of people came to see them, disturbed his family and took up his time. At first, two radio station personalities claimed that they made the circles. Then the station admitted that it had nothing to do with the crop circles, that the two staff members were trying to trick another on-air person by saying that they did it. An investigator decided that the Howell crop circles had been formed by some sort of natural phenomenon.

The Million Dollar Bill

In March 2004 the *Lansing State Journal*, and many other newspapers, reported the arrest of a woman in Georgia. She wanted to buy merchandise worth \$1,675. She gave the check-out clerk a fake \$1 million bill to pay for it. The bill had a picture of the Statue of Liberty on it. The U. S. government does not print bills with a \$1 million denomination, but some gag and gift stores sell them as play money. The woman was arrested.

Effects of Hoaxes

Hoax	Which Core Democratic Value was disregarded?	Who would lose trust?	A Bad Economic Effect	A Bad Scholarly or Scientific Effect
The Cardiff Giant				
The Piltdown Man				
Wisconsin State Capitol Collapses				
The Hitler Diaries				
The Taco Liberty Bell				
Howell Crop Circles – Plus a 2 nd Hoax				
The Million Dollar Bill				

Effects of Hoaxes – Possible Responses

Hoax	Which Core Democratic Value was disregarded?	Who would lose trust?	A Bad Economic Effect (Lost time=lost money)	A Bad Scholarly or Scientific Effect
The Cardiff Giant	All hoaxes disregard both the Pursuit of Happiness and the Common Good in trying to convince others of something that is not true or real.	People who believed that the Cardiff Giant was real might not trust the next discovery, which could be authentic.	People wasted 50¢ (a lot of money in the 1870s) to see the fake.	Provided wrong scientific evidence about what earlier people looked like..
The Piltdown Man		People who believed that the Piltdown Man was real might not trust the next discovery, which could be authentic.	People spent money to see and to study the fake.	Provided wrong scientific evidence about how humans evolved..
Wisconsin State Capitol Collapses		The people who read the Capital-Times newspaper might not trust future articles.	People wasted time discussing it when they should have been working. People bought the newspaper because of it	It may have given other hoaxers ideas about manipulating photographs.
The Hitler Diaries		Researchers and others who study history, specifically, the history of World War II would mistrust future information.	The German magazine lost the money it paid for the diaries. It cost the government to take the perpetrators to court and imprison them.	For a while it added false information to history—that Hitler kept diaries.
The Taco Liberty Bell		People in general would have less trust in advertisements.	Although Taco Bell, the advertising company and newspapers that ran the ads made money, other media wasted staff time investigating and reporting the hoax.	People might think that the government really would consider selling national treasures if it needed money.
Howell Crop Circles – Plus a 2nd Hoax		People who study these natural phenomena would mistrust future reports. Listeners of the radio station would not believe their future announcements.	The farmer lost some of his crop and much of his time dealing with the people who came to see the crop circles.	The radio station's announcement delayed interpretation of the circles as a phenomenon of nature.
The Million Dollar Bill		The store clerk might mistrust future large denomination bills.	An attempt was made to swindle the store out of \$1,675. A store clerk would have to return merchandise to shelves. The government spent money to arrest and prosecute the woman.	Store employees might have to take special training classes in identifying counterfeit money.

Fakes and a Fraud

Web Resources, Activities and Lesson Plans

The Art of the Fake: Egyptian Forgeries from the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

<http://www.ipl.org/div/kelsey/>

Compare authentic artifacts with forgeries in the museum's collection.

Don't Be Fooled by a Photograph, National Geographic eXpeditions

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/03/g68/hoaxphoto.html>

Students study photos that have been altered digitally to learn the implications of doctoring photos.

The Great Moon Hoax, Science at NASA

<http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/development/4review%5Fhoax.html>

Read or listen to a story about people who doubted that the United States really landed on the moon.

Handwriting and Forgery, [discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com), The Discovery Channel

<http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/forgery/>

Find out how document analysis helps forensic scientists solve crimes in this lesson.

History's Greatest Hoaxes, The History Channel

<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/hoax/hoax.html>

True or false? Fact or fiction? Guess whether the claim on the page is true and get immediate feedback.

Hoaxbusters, U.S. Dept. of Energy, CIAC (Computer Incident Advisory Capability)

<http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org/HoaxBustersHome.html>

Find out the history, types of and cost of Internet hoaxes.

Many Ways of Seeing, Lesson One: Fakes and Forgeries (ArtsEdNet, The Getty's Arts Education Web Site)

<http://www.getty.edu/artsednet/resources/Sampler/c-1.html>

This lesson plan lets students become art detectives as they learn the differences among original art, a copy and a forgery.

Michigan—the home of Noah's Ark? Vivian M. Baulch, *The Detroit News*

<http://www.detnews.com/history/hoax/hoax.htm>

or

<http://info.detnews.com/history/story/index.cfm?id=137&category=life>

This article is an overview of the Michigan Relics hoax by a *Detroit News* writer.

Scams and Hoaxes, Court TV's Crime Library

http://www.crimelibrary.com/criminal_mind/scams/index.html

See a list of famous forgeries such as Hitler's diaries, Lincoln's letters, the Piltdown Man and more.

What's the Real Deal? Microsoft

<http://www.microsoft.com/education/default.asp?ID=realdeal>

Whether it's a Beanie Baby or a software program, it could be counterfeit. This lesson lets students plan their own campaign against piracy.